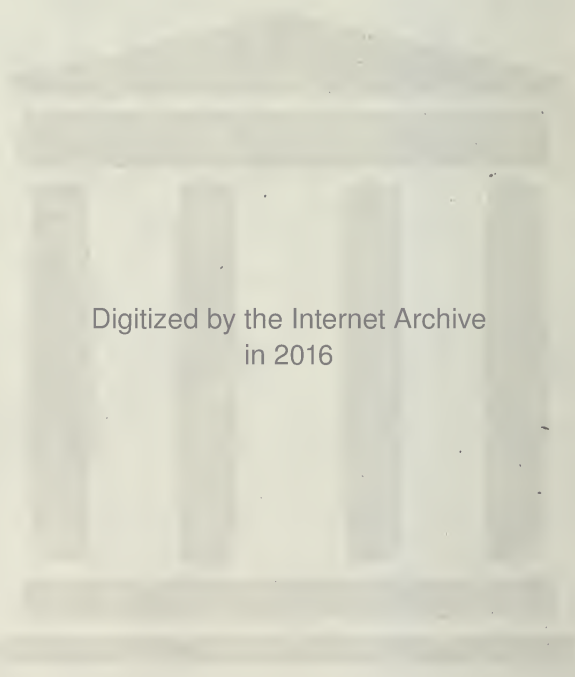


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TO THE RIGHT HONOURABLE

WILLIAM PITT, &c.

SIR,

WHILE the successful endeavours of Majesty to protect the fine arts, and of Administration to increase the wealth and prosperity of the country, induce the Englishman himself to lay aside his gloom, and confess the present period the most brilliant in its annals, it will not seem extraordinary that I should hope to throw lustre, by its dedication to a first Minister, of eminent character, and great abilities, on a drama, which may recall to the recollection of their descendants that noble work of a patriotic king and people (imitated lately by Poland), the first attempt, though effectual, to frame a government upon the principles of reason.

Not long since it could only be my ambition to address myself, in the language of encou-

ragement, to you, as to the most conspicuous champion of a cause which had not put its fortune to the trial, by resisting attempts to restore a species of government which has failed, in place of one which has succeeded in this country. Surrounding nations yet doubted how far the good sense of England would go ; I rejoice now in using that of congratulation on the subsequent proofs of steadiness and loyalty they have received, and on a victory capable of inspiring you with that confidence in your strength, by which a Minister of your qualities will not be lulled to security, but animated to fresh exertions.

I have the honour to be,

SIR,

With due respect,

Your most obedient

and most humble Servant,

THE AUTHOR.

MEN.

Alfred, king of England,

Mervin, his dependant, a prince of South Wales.

Ethelred, general of the English.

Ceoluph, a treacherous English noble.

*A Danish captain of auxiliaries, brought to the
Danes from Ireland.*

Ceoluph's vassal.

Chorus of Attendants on the Queen.

Guards, Soldiers, &c.

WOMEN.

Elsitha, queen of England.

A Woman inhabiting the cottage.

SCENE. *Broken and woody in the foreground,
where a cottage stands. In the distant country,
remains of convents and churches destroyed by
the Danes.*

THE
BATTLE OF EDDINGTON;
OR,
BRITISH LIBERTY.

ACT I.

SCENE I.

*Enter the English, driving the Danes before them;
afterwards, with swords drawn.*

Mervin, Ethelred.

ETHELRED.

AT length, impell'd by our prevailing arms,
The lawless hosts give way, and o'er the plain
Soft-hearted pity marks the route, with smiles
At victory's quiet hour, in thought delightful.
Thus far be praise to heav'n! The Danish lord
Stands not our charge, but, as the panic spreads,
(Thou saw'st him, Mervin) flies from man to
man,
Forbidding fear, but vainly, and retreats

Still as he cheers them, with well acted boldness.
 If fortune stay, rapine shall yield her gains,
 And leave th' invaded isle to peace and Alfred.

Merv. Yes. Now, brave Ethelred, what honour flies us

The valiant covets, or the good esteems?
 Proud of your blameless cause, and noble leader,
 Long have ye triumph'd amid matchless sufferings,

Blest in fair praise, and victors in your virtue:
 Now mindful heav'n is to those sufferings just,
 And crowns our infant union with advantage.
 Yet ere, instructed of the weal of Wales,
 I to your king did homage for my power,
 An ally and dependant, oft (how oft!)
 My secret heart prepar'd the ties which bind me
 To such whose brave exploits uphold the cause
 Not of one people only, but mankind.
 How did his worth inspire me! how, e'en then,
 Did rising veneration prompt to share
 In his just cause, each fell vicissitude,
 War at his side, and join my fate to his!

Eth. Nor have, I trust, on this eventful day,

His acts e'er mov'd to censure. Since thou saw'st
The chief, whom only rumour had made known,
Thou didst not, with an alter'd judgment, prize
His proffer'd love.

Merv. What searcher e'er could find
Report, though eloquent, transcend his prowess?
And, if more peaceful worth as fairly shews,
I, when the marching army left the camp,
This morn confess'd it, since nor Alfred's self,
Nor did the fair Elsitha more bewail,
Than I, their solemn parting.

Eth. There, yes, there
Thou saw'st no common love, nor cold return.
Knowing the country wide o'erspread with foes,
The monarch fears to trust her far from sight,
And where we move, still she accompanies
Our troops, unaw'd by the terrific shew.
Hence many a witness of their tender love;
And hence, pervading many a Briton's breast,
Has fondest admiration of the pair
Still added daily force to patriot ardour.

Merv. No less th' appearance promis'd. O my
friend,

How does domestic love, whose charms exalt
The very cot, with grateful splendour shine
On the conspicuous throne!

Eth. If such th' esteem
Now harbour'd in so true a breast for Alfred,
Learn, it may not prove vain, but more perhaps,
Be friendly to his peace, than either thou
Or he could dream.

Merv. Withhold not welcome tidings;
What friendship can perform, shall mine for
Alfred.

Eth. O, prince, the firm and boundless cō-
fidence
With which in all our counsels his regard
Does honour to thy faith and noble virtues,
Invites my fearless speech; and while success,
Thus far secur'd, can spare us from the battle,
I crave so long thine ear. One wars with us
Whom we perhaps suspected not in vain.

Merv. I seek not far the person thou intend'st.

Eth. Know then, 'tis certain he who came to me,
Escaping from the bands which, under Alfred,
Lord Ceoluph commands, told of the rumour

Around him whisper'd, and supposes hence
 That lord sent one, ere yet the battle join'd,
 To treat in secret with the troops of Ireland,
 Who, since that country bow'd its head to conquest,
 Have strengthen'd the barbarian with their numbers.

Merv. Ha! yet 'tis well that matter thus unapt
 Is spread to catch the dangerous sparks of treason.
 Th' auxiliars will not promptly war with Pagans
 For bloody spoils, against their God and conscience.

Eth. This was foreseen by Alfred, and he
 hence
 So plac'd the men of Ceoluph, direct
 Against the Irish front—For well he knew
 The brave maintains the feeblest fight with justice.
 Besides, long amity has join'd our nations
 With links of kindness. How does civil broil
 Differ from this? Scot against Scot contends.
 Thou know'st our allies from the north, who long
 Supported Alfred's battles ere this day,
 Scarce oftener own, for theirs, the appellation.

Merv. Yes, well I know their colonies of old
 Migrating to that neighb'ring isle, at length
 Equall'd its natives in the fame of numbers:
 A friendly junction rose, and was the stock
 Whence population branch'd its fuller honours.
 Irish and Scot convey like purport, there,
 And in the language of those islanders.
 But say, was it his daring enterprize
 That taught so well the quarters of the foe?

Eth. It was, and when he sought them with
 his harp,
 In mean disguise, stirr'd by the new report
 Of prosp'rous war wag'd by the lord of Devon;
 When there he pass'd unknown full many a day,
 More than all this he learn'd. 'Tis true, his si-
 lence
 Observ'd at Selwood, where we met in arms,
 Was most unchang'd, nor wish'd he here to open
 One avenue to treachery's dark assaults.
 But all these were precautions, so to guard
 Our cause from foes as dangerous, though con-
 ceal'd:

Hence, too, our rapid march, and hence the watch

So vigilantly pac'd our nightly stations.
 If traitors have conspir'd, uncertainty
 Hung on their counsels, and perhaps their plans
 Confus'd, as multiplied to suit occasions
 None could foresee, have disappear'd in nought.
 But, if the news be true this soldier speaks,
 'Twere well to guard the life and cause of Alfred.

Merv. Our task is plain. Yes, let us straight
 divide,

The sooner to search out the chief engag'd
 In close pursuit, and fortune speed th'endeavour.
 This is my way. [going.

Eth. Yet from that brook hard by,
 Observe, thus warn'd, each various movement:
 there

Expect awhile my counsel. I must know
 This new appearance (which from hence I see
 Of men in British dress, and British arms.
 'Tis wondrous! with the troops, t'improve ad-
 vantage,

They mingled not with like alacrity.

[*Exit Mervin.*

Ethelred, Semichorus.

Eth. In what close quest tread ye so slow the
 plains

Of Eddington, as wanting in your search
Assistant knowledge? If to Britons I,
A Briton, can afford it, cease your pains;
And if some measure, useful to our arms,
Ambition prompt, your leader best may guide:
But I perceive, aslant your shoulders slung,
The peaceful harp, that speaks a different calling.

Sem. We tremble, hearing this is Eddington,
For which we have exchange'd our safe retreat,
And trusted through less devious paths to seek
 you,
Attendant on the queen.

Eth. The queen!

Sem. Not far,
Alighted from the chariot, which in vain
Pursued your surer steps, ere yet the foes
Alarm'd had seal'd her danger, fast she seeks
Some refuge here.

Eth. Ah! too advent'rous virtue!

Would that when Buthred, her ill-fated brother,
 Driv'n by the Danes from his Northumbrian
 throne,

Sought quiet in the friendly walls of Rome,
 Would she had then accompany'd his flight;
 Ev'n from the war's first outset lodg'd in safety:
 But love, too powerful, made her slight entreaty,
 And share the saddest sorrows of her lord.

What brings her?

Sem. The reputed cause, if true,
 Is not of trivial moment; but t' impart
 Some undivulg'd position of affairs,
 And so assist your labours. See her come.

Elsitha, Ethelred, Chorus.

Eth. Good fortune, smiling on this haunt of
 danger,
 More dread by bloody desolation made,
 Protect our rever'd queen. If right our hopes
 Augur, midst blessings, their continuance
 This meeting may befriend, which first in me
 Offers thy will a ready minister.
 And much the time requires some helpful agent,

Whether to free thee from all dreads of danger,
Or trace, if sought, the king.

Els. What touches him

I need not, doubtful, from his friend withhold,
Imposing but a servile drudgery.

Listen thyself, assur'd I readier bless

Th'event that offers to my secret tale

The ear of confidence. Retire awhile,

My faithful band; our labour, and your pains,

Have not been useless to the cause of Alfred.

[they retire.]

Eth. Still may it, as it has begun, proceed!

Nor did it, nor shall ever want from me

Support, such as this day we boast successful.

For now the Dane stands firm, now slow re-
treats,

But still before us flies. We give not way,

But, led by Alfred, antedate success.

While the pursuing troops his voice exhorts,

His looks inspire, he waves the royal blade,

And on his restless casque the studded crown

Beams far. Beneath it, as in youthful beauty

He sternly dooms the foe, or cheers his men;

By turns the wand'ring eye appears to cross
The frown of death, or winning charms of love.

Els. O! if unnotic'd treachery impede
The limbs that grapple with outrageous daring,
What may they do? What, against treachery's
force

Avails each quality his tott'ring sway,
That captivates, and that unites the people;
The warrior's matchless skill, the statesman's
prudence,

Seductive eloquence, excelling science?
Once these, and all his merits, would'st thou
speak,

Till admiration kindled into love :
Now, Ethelred, relume thy boasted zeal;
Now prove it.

Eth. I no less have heard the rumour
Of somewhat fatal to the peace of England,
Secretly plann'd (which thou may'st now in-
tend);

And am the readier led t' inquire of thee
What fame has more unravell'd.

Els. Not less secret

Than is the machination, was the source
 From which my knowledge, if 'tis knowledge,
 flow'd;

For not through all the army did one tongue
 Dare to reveal the purpose.

Eth. Yet 'twas they

From forth whose numbers the instruction came?

Els. Yes, soon as far beyond the utmost reach
 Of active zeal, or earnest sympathy,
 They had retir'd; long I accompanied
 Their marching steps; nor when at last I bade
 Alfred farewell, and left them to their progress,
 Did my eyes straight rove from them, but pur-
 su'd,

Amid the wreathing dust, his cause's cham-
 pions.

This chiefly woke regret, when my return
 Too late discover'd, in the royal tent,
 Th' instructive scrolls.

Eth. Which they left haply there,
 Departing?

Els. And, with clearness, characters,
 Though set down by the hand of mystery,

Shew'd each informer's meaning. Nought sub-
scrib'd

To these unown'd alarms, these written terrors,
Shews how the warning came, though all unfold
Some plotted mischief; nor yet, strange to tell!
The enemies, but those we held adherents,
Seem foremost of th' accus'd. In this they join,
Varying their tales. One of concerted schemes
Between some chieftain and the hostile leader,
At large instructs; one names a subject Dane,
As tempting to some faithless stratagem,
Different in kind; and one their foreign aids:
A fourth, more anxious, terrifies with fears
Of covert danger, and th' assassin's steel:
But all, ambiguous, no where point the traitor.

Eth. These facts at least may clear some new
suspicions,

(Caus'd haply by the fruit of riper counsels)
And arm inquiry with a surer pretext.

Els. Mov'd by such fears, I left the lonely camp,
With earliest speed. What could not duty do,
When back'd by inclination? Here I rest
After the toilsome morn, and, as a queen,

Am strongly mov'd to what upholds the nation;
 But as a wife—O, pardon, Ethelred,
 If much that tender tie partook the merit
 My coming may confer, and urges thee
 To hasten Alfred.

Eth. Of so just a motive,
 No subject, princess, need complain; it adds
 Force to that public spirit it attends.
 While hence I go, that shed may be a shelter,
 These guards defend; which soon the royal
 Mervin,
 Who waits me not far distant, shall augment,
 As may suffice. Be mine to seek our sov'reign.
[Exit.

Elsitha, Chorus.

Chor. If the queen's pleasure favour our attempt,
 We, from the simple inmates of this mansion,
 Will crave their artless hospitality,
 And to the door approach.
Els. 'Tis that we mean,
 Respecting still their helpless poverty.

Chor. You that reside beneath this roof—

Wom. O, spare,
Spare an unhurtful, unimportant life,
To none obnoxious.

Chor. How has fear oppress'd
Her aged wretchedness! Thy words betray
An erring fancy, and mistake—

Wom. That fate
Which plac'd me low, may well exempt from
dangers
That on th' ambitious wait!

Els. Harbour not thoughts
Of enmity, nor e'er surmise that I
Draw near this cot with haughtier expectations
Than swell the vagrant's breast. I ask admit-
tance

A suppliant, though a queen. Conceal me straight
In safety from the Dane, whom England rues,
Whene'er, through many a year, reflection num-
bers

Her murder'd and despoil'd inhabitants.

Elsitha, Woman, Chorus.

Wom. O, queen, forgive the tardiness of fear,
 That, by the terrors of this day confounded,
 Mistook your voice for what still rings around me;
 The voice of threat'ning foes, whose dreadful arms
 Thrice have assail'd my door! once had their swords
 Fall'n fatal, had they not been call'd from me,
 Or by caprice, or some new enterprize.
 If 'tis so high a guest honours this shed,
 Let me not fail to say, that prudence' self
 Invites within its walls.

Els. Accept the thanks
 Of sincere gratitude, whether from birth
 A patrimonial dwelling here contain'd,
 Or sad reverse of fate has forc'd thee hither,
 To pass, in unforeseen obscurity,
 Thy lowring evening of unsteady life.

Wom. Alas! I never lifted soaring thoughts
 To that high pitch, nor was possess'd of greatness:
 Only with mod'rate plenty, mine by lot,
 I wish'd to live unenvied, and unseen,
 And free t' enjoy that little birth bestow'd.

This was not given: the tyrannic arm
 Of lordly barons, o'er my hapless house
 Was stretch'd, that suffer'd all extortion's wrongs,
 All the rapacious craft of partial law.

Yet, ere invasion ting'd our fields with blood,
 For heavier sorrows, from the reverend domes
 Whose ruins now the Danish lines o'erspread,
 We gain'd wherewith to furnish sustenance;
 Resorting to their hospitable porch
 Oft, with th' o'erwearied pilgrim, and the poor;
 My children too, and I, as suited each,
 Barter'd our service, bearing from the woods
 Their fuel, or from streams their finny food;
 Or bearing else the needle's workmanship,
 For simple cloathing meant, or various use.

O what destruction with the change comes on!
 Welt'ring in blood hard by, myself beheld,
 Full many a pale religious float the isles
 That echoed to his groans. Myself beheld,
 Direst of sights!—great queen, excuse my tears—
 Those I brought forth by violence expire!

Els. Less may'st thou mourn the work of
 fierce barbarians,

If this day's brave attempt (whose dangers brought
me)

As 'tis approv'd, be favour'd so of heaven;
For Alfred toils alike to chase from England
The frowns of furious war, and fix on peace
The throne of incorrupt, unerring justice.

You here, my lov'd attendants, raise some
strain

Whose loyal sounds, first heard at Athelney
To cheat the tedious hours of forc'd retreat,
Oft won our pleas'd attention, charming round
The rushy borders of th' united streams.

[*Exeunt Queen and Woman.*

Chorus.

SONG.

Let worth, let patriot zeal, with eye
O'erflowing, and with drooping head,
Let all who venerate the mysterious tie
Of wedded love, or power, bemoan,
Chas'd to the refuge of th' obscure retreat
By savage foes o'er his dominion spread,

Respect the pathless marsh where mingling
meet

The stores of Parret and of Thone.

While heedless of himself the chief

But labour'd for his country's good,

There his lov'd partner long partook his grief,

Amid a circling infant race :

There long, the cause of England to support,

His subject-squadron every bribe withstood

Of want, unblam'd misfortune taught to court,

And cherish undeserv'd disgrace.

If e'er repose, and hop'd success,

Reward the battle-wasted bands ;

If e'er the counsels sage of Alfred bless

With promis'd law th' impatient realm,

Long hence the thoughtful Briton shall ex-
claim,

As on the bank, with folded arms, he stands :

“ Here could not foes extinguish virtue's
flame,

“ Nor growing liberty o'erwhelm.

“ Leaving this ambush, girt with reeds,
 “ Full oft our fathers to th’ increase
 “ Of urging ills oppos’d advent’rous deeds,
 “ And vengeance dreadful, though un-
 “ known,
 “ Till happier triumphs teem’d, for wearied
 “ woe,
 “ The friendly refuge, and the fruits of peace.
 “ Then near the pathless marsh still honour’d
 “ flow,
 “ Ye streams of Parret and of Thone.”

ACT II.

Ceoluph, Vassal, Chorus.

Chor. Say, thou that in the guise of war array'd,
Dost guide thy course towards our appointed
station,
Com'st thou a friend?

Ceol. Thou say'st, and one who here
(Yes, 'twas this house) awaits a prince's orders
But duly thus to serve ye. Ceoluph
Is he whose speech salutes his fellow Britons.
And tell me, on what separate scheme intent
Linger you here?

Chor. Our task is now t'attend
Our much-lov'd mistress, and afflicted queen;
Who, drawn by rumours strange, (as'tis assur'd)
Has from the camp arriv'd, and in this hovel
Reposes. Happy will she hear the news
Of this event.

Ceol. [*apart to Vass.*] Dissemble we his coming;
It has not gone too far.

Vass. What thy intent
I yet divine not; but shall favour it,
Taught by thy future style.

Chor. Then Alfred soon—

Ceol. Mistake not. Understood ye Alfred
comes?

Chor. We thought our sovereign's presence
drew thee hither.

Ceol. Another prince, thou know'st, our brave
ally,

Wars in our ranks; the chief of Wales not far
Is station'd, fitly for our martial meetings.

Let our united efforts prove of use
In aid of female royalty, whose danger
Harrows the soul with fear.

Chor. We have not wanted
Some friends to counsel, yet we learn not what
The queen resolves to do—If aid be promis'd,
Or she expects it; and enough we need
Methinks both of advice to know our danger,
And fit assistance to contend with it.

Ceol. With whom did you consult? or whom
did chance

First offer to your view?

Chor. The noble leader

Alfred intrusts with the supreme command.

Awhile he kept the queen in private talk,

Then speeded straight away.

Geol. [*apart to Vass.*] No time be lost.

These, as not sparing friendship's offices,

Lead o'er the ground; and that no coming leader

Menace detection, mark thou well each place

Of danger all around, save on this side

Where station'd close we hold our troops prepar'd,

And keep one inlet for the enemy.

This we may safe neglect. Our arms so near

Shall seem dissuading the superfluous caution.

[*loud.*

Your either wish be now accomplish'd, friends;

For Mervin and myself will timely here

Ask of the queen if more remain to do

For your protection: then supply your wants.

Meanwhile this faithful follower will conduct you

To each defile mistrusted. And since we

Join to discuss affairs importing much

The general cause, I crave the more your absence,

That while you watchfully survey the ground,
Mindful of this instructor, we may meet,
And unperceiv'd deliberate on those secrets
Right policy would hide.

Chor. Then let us go,
That no obtrusive eye, no neighb'ring ear
May violate their sacred privacy. [*Ex. Chor.*
[*Ceoluph beckons to Vassal.*

Ceoluph, Vassal.

Ceol. This prize must not escape me; who,
possest,
And safe detain'd as an illustrious prisoner,
May soothe the Dane, at least sate my revenge.
And shall these know that he I now expect
Is Alfred?

Vass. I perceive thy recent project.

Ceol. Yes, fortune brighter smiles, yet of us asks
More ardent wooing. We must not be slow.
Who knows but in the English ranks some one
May tamper with these Irish, too dispos'd;
Seeing they murmur at th' ungrateful strife.
Nay, haply, when he fool'd away, but late,

With harp and ditties in the Danish camp,
 Charming its great with music and with mirth;
 Then haply did this busy, meddling Alfred,
 Whose cunning counteracts our best designs,
 With wonted art essay their inclination,
 Enfeebling their affection for their lords.
 Whence, if 'tis ours to play desertion's game,
 'Twere well, that what is done, were done with
 speed,

Vass. Then is there hope, thou, ere this bold
 attempt,

Try to regain thy sov'reign's confidence.

Ceol. Once more I will essay what interest's
 goad,

Ev'n upon spirits most untractable,
 Can manifest of power. My influence spreads
 Wide through the army. This day will insure
 His crown, or ruin. The victorious troops
 Must clamour for new laws. Zeal is profuse—
 Their love—How willing would they bend to
 Alfred!

Vass. When shall my lord decide me, if he
 fail,

To speed his message to the Irish lines;
 But, if his promises win o'er the king,
 Then to forbear.

Geol. Should he deserve forbearance,
 Thou well shalt understand, ere Alfred go :
 Else, (for he comes t' examine our position,
 And learn the battle's site) thou may'st escort
 him,

While I seem busied by a leader's call,
 Till in the ranks we meet at length again.
 Yet be not this, ere thou avertest far,
 With store of civil assiduities,
 His steps from our battalion's utmost limits.

Vass. 'Tis fear'd, perhaps, his presence with
 our schemes
 May interfere.

Geol. Hence must thou trace him far;
 But when I hear of thy return, that moment
 A truce, proclaim'd 'twixt opposite commanders,
 Shall still the sounds of war, and let thee pass,
 Bearing th' agreed conditions. I myself
 Will head their troops, and this way lead them on.
 But hie thee hence, for he approaches fast:—

Retire, and mingling with the queen's attendants,
 Keep them where Alfred's person may not thwart
 The prying sight ; else all were lost.

Vass. I go.

[*Exit.*

Alfred, Ceoluph.

Ceol. Blest be the day that offers to my liege
 Such earnest of the hope of faithful subjects ;
 That peace which may insure us all the blessings
 Of the firm state our English strive to found ;
 While some, perhaps, rest on new laws their hope
 Of gen'ral bliss, I more on Alfred's power.

Alf. Lord Ceoluph, it causes our surprise,
 That so thy public judgment seems t' incline,
 If thou would'st speak, admitting in our isle
 The loftier claims of arbitrary power.
 None seek I more, that fits that government,
 Of mingled form, which but the sage has plann'd,
 Weighing the wrongs that from each order flow,
 Each grievance ; and administ'ring redress
 Through rights inherent in the sep'rate orders,
 Mutually balanc'd for the general peace :
 Such claims suffice th' ambition I dare feel.

Geo!. Yet, sire, I see with diff'rent eyes that
right

Which reason measures by the public good.
The failing force of government requires
Some prop, that leans not on th' unsteady footing
Of tangled law, or popular caprice;
And asks full scope to guide its useful efforts.
Is freedom boasted? Oft 'tis idly boasted;
And least its rights advantage their possessors,
Vice still exerts them to encourage wrong;
And virtue, not less oft, misled by error,
Puts to their meanest, than their noblest use.

Alf. Better that rulers should sustain some
hindrance,
Than quench in man the spark of conscious worth,
And covet base obedience, as from slaves;
Close chain th' infirmities of subject-spirits,
Yet set, their own, as terrible, at large.
With other mortals, let a prince's nod
Condemn the innocent, and spare the guilty,
Solely resolve th' accepted laws of truth,
Of property and life, or public thrift;
But free as his own thoughts be every Briton.

Ceol. Were worthless pride to seek extended
power,

Then should I join my patriot views to thine :
But, mighty sire, who rules our British land?
He through whose arms the foe in vain aug-
ments.

Who would for power obtain the people's vote?
He who exerts it only for their welfare.
Alfred, among the dread events of war,
With active spirit can improve our trade.
But is it hence (though stretch'd to India's
shore)

Is industry at home our plea for insult?
He sends his sails t' explore, in seas remote,
New coasts, and stretch the limits of the globe,
Not hoping, as I judge, the world's reproof,
But praise, such as awaits advent'rous virtue.
First of our kings, if he prepar'd for Britain,
What destiny design'd her, ocean's empire,
And built the floating bulwarks of our shores,
Will sapient censure hold, on subject hearts
He weakens but one claim, or with less title
Commands the proffer'd aid of Ceoluph?

Alf. High rat'st thou such desert, Lord Ceol-
luph.

Thou call'st, withholding that return, disgrace;
Ah! dream we not that merit, howe'er great,
Has magic power to change the laws of justice.

Ceol. Conviction, sire, still follows what thou
say'st;

And doubt and error fly my clearer reason.

Yet what say I? Could e'er a noble mind

Mistake the best, or e'en divided stand,

Did Heav'n not grace one king with qualities

To win th' intractable—to charm with chains.

At length, for ever I resume my reason,

Taught by th' example ev'n of Alfred's self:

Now, now, let liberty unbounded rule

These happy fields! whose sovereign that as-
sistance

Which press'd t' exalt, would dare to strip of
greatness,

While what he lost in power, he gain'd in glory.

Alf. As little would th' extreme of liberty,
As unmix'd power, forebode our country's good.
The wide extent of our connected isle,

Now first united for its welfare, asks
 A firmer power to fix its scatter'd parts,
 To hold them join'd, as from a common centre;
 For policy as sage may guide our councils,
 As spread the fame of ancient lawgivers,
 While thus we frame our state; which may ex-
 hibit

Both larger power, and greater liberty.
 No sad excesses in a state are worse
 Than anarchy's, nor ask a firmer check:
 Beneath it, ever does the weak man suffer,
 Vex'd by the strong and base; and, ruin'd fame
 Engrossing gradual favour, wealth itself
 Endanger'd, more afflicts than poverty.
 'Tis what distinguishes our race from brutes:
 That one by rule, and maxims preconceiv'd,
 Orders his actions, on mature reflection
 Engrafting virtue's growth for fairer fruits;
 The others, by no common tie confin'd,
 As impulse urges, or as force compels,
 Obey the laws but of instinctive being.

Geol. [*pausing confusedly.*] Suits it the loyal
 subject to contend

With higher wisdom in a reverenc'd sovereign?
 Yielding to greatness, he but bows to reason :
 Nor shall I strive, with disobedient seeming,
 To justify the taunts of obloquy.
 Too much its victim, sire, I felt its darts,
 Since the sad Buthred from his reign was driv'n :
 Myself a Thane beneath him, and much honour'd
 By the good chief; none of his household more.
 The Danes then crown'd me; but could I prevent
 Their liking, or oppose their thoughtless choice?
 This swell'd the clamour of malicious tongues ;
 Yet soon they deem'd it fittest to depose me.
 In truth, 'twas rumour'd that I meanly stoop'd
 To pillage what, as king, I reign'd to guard,
 Th' intrusted treasure ; and that hence the same
 Who late bestow'd on me the power, resum'd it.
 Thus, sire, detraction construed to worst views
 My partial fealty ; and the very sufferings
 It brought on me, rose up in adverse judgment.
 But who will venture to disprove my truth,
 When face to face we stand before our sov' reign?
 Him let me challenge to discover ought ;
 Him let me call—

Alf. We wander, Ceoluph,
 From that first public salutary bent
 Of our discourse, and verge to light concerns;
 For 'tis most sure th' assistance thou hast offer'd,
 Has but a public, and no private object,
 Enticing from such urgent care our thoughts;
 And time suffices scarce t' enquire as needs,
 The fate of wasteful war, or how dispos'd
 Thy troops, and in what posture is the battle?

Ceol. A leader's duty asks no slumb'ring care,
 And forces me, unwilling, from that office,
 Which yet a faithful vassal may assume.
 He waits full near, withdrawn awhile, that I
 More secretly might learn my liege's will.

Alfred, Ceoluph, Vassal.

Ceol. I beckon'd thee t' accompany our sov'-
 reign
 Along the rear, and duly mark our posture.—
 Sire, through yon thicket lies the nearest path.

[Exeunt Alfred and Vassal.]

Ceolufh, Chorus.

Ceol. (aside) Blest, then, thy safe departure.

Chor. Sway'd, my lord,

By the advice thy vassal gave, we came.

He bade us, when we parted, pause a space,

Then to this spot return: but since return'd,

We fail not earnestly to ask, if aid

Be now intended by the western prince,

Or others; and if soon we so may place it,

As suits with the instructions of thy vassal.

Our fears and our impatience keep like pace.

Ceol. Friends, be secure, and hope that soon
the prince

Will hither come, bearing the earliest arms,

Ev'n as he promis'd. Ye require the king;

Then must I, for your business, forthwith hence.

Chorus.

Sem. See I not also in thy looks pourtray'd

Some slight mistrust, while proof is yet withheld,

Of all this late discourse? Myself confess it.

This lord (our danger will excuse my freedom)

Was in his master's throne by Danish arms
 First seated with suspicious circumstance :
 Then to descend constrain'd, on charge of fraud ;
 And few in Alfred's court, perhaps, may doubt
 His dark designs, though all seems hush'd in
 public,

Nor does the name of traitor brand his credit.
 'Tis true that, follow'd by a concourse large
 Of arm'd retainers, against England's foes,
 He brings no mean assistance, and deserves
 Much of the reverence due to lofty rank,
 Paid him by all, amid th' united army.
 But ask we yet if aught the queen expect
 From others, lest security deceive us,
 And lest we fall the victims of his promise,
 Unaided at the last. *[going to the cottage.]*

Ser. 'Tis needless. Hold——

I judg'd so, till this moment yonder troop
 Skirted the wood, approaching this recess.
 'Tis Mervin who precedes, of Arthur's race,
 Brave prince! he comes appointed by that lord,
 No doubt; for instant as announc'd behold him,
 Heading his men. Leave we mistrustful thoughts:

Suspicion may be just in generous minds,
Yet never can it please.

Mervin, Chorus, Guards with Mervin.

Merv. My friends, I err,
Or through the thicket, as I pass'd in speed,
The gleam of armour, moving towards the battle,
Declar'd that chieftain's absence, whose com-
mands

I thus pursue. Is he not gone, at length,
From these surrounding glades?

Chor. Yes, and did promise
Thy aid. Thy sudden coming, and apt speech,
Confirm our disposition to obey him;
Persuading, as his better judgment taught us,
To station this battalion for defence.

Merv. And rightly you obey; for I surmise
He from your knowledge has withheld no danger,
That asks such fearful care, or thoughtful skill.
If any were untold, ere hence he went,
Pleas'd should I remedy th' effects of haste,
Else will not with advice affront his knowledge.

Chor. He parted hence as in no need to speak

Of more, but wholly bent on his design
 To seek the king, and by such added labour
 Shorten our task : whose main intent we much,
 Much wish indeed accomplish'd ; wish to see
 These royal patterns of connubial love
 Both in one place, and mourn no useless journey,
 No care besides seems lab'ring in his breast ;
 And well his reason's satisfied.

Merv. Enough.

I too shall hasten, warm'd by equal zeal,
 And equal admiration of their love,
 T' assist a search that may provide its triumph.
 Th' endeavours of so many cannot fail
 In some part of the battle soon to find him,
 And do what's wish'd for England's sake and
 theirs. [*Exit.*

Chorus, Guards.

Chor. Go, one, and marshalling th' attendant
 aids,
 Straight draw them off to each suspected pass,
 Their destin'd station.

Chorus.

We, remaining here,
 Mean while, shall on our slumb'ring harps re-
 sound
 Some suited air, anxious to chase the fears
 Which, with its awful cries, and noise of arms,
 The neighb'ring battle may well rouze in all,
 But readiest in the tender female mind.
 Hence is our skill most needful, hence the voice
 And artful hand might, for no useless rapture,
 Unite their soothing charms, and secret power.
 But is a noble theme requir'd? What nobler
 Than the high birth-right of this gallant chief,
 That nation, and their fate, who, foes no more,
 Now join to ours unconquerable arms.
 Could claim th' harmonious homage? Virtuous
 prince,
 And virtuous people, our cemented friendship
 Is by the English minstrel not despis'd,
 But warbled to his harp, respected, lives.

SONG.

When Arthur fill'd the island-throne,
 He stemm'd the boist'rous flood that pour'd
 From circling cliffs, and scorn'd alone
 Th' opposers of his guardian sword;
 Piercing the Angle's firm array,
 (Each power invok'd to Christians known)
 As gleam'd its waving blade a ray,
 Auspicious to the Briton's fame;
 And, to the savage tribe of Thor,
 Amazement, o'er the files of war,
 And death, where'er it darted, came.

Chiefs lie o'erwhelm'd, whose ruin awes,
 As vanquish'd oaks bestrew the ground,
 Snatch'd, ere the threats of lightning pause,
 Or cease the whirlwind-waste around.
 For toils like these, the Cambrian sings,
 Absolv'd from nature's wonted laws,
 The destin'd sire of future kings
 Reclines on flowers of fairy-land;
 And o'er the race he fir'd in vain
 To freedom, and his ancient reign,
 Again shall stretch his wide command.

But tell, my harp, that from on high,
Subdu'd the terrors of the tomb,
He sees fierce arts from Albion fly,
Rejoicing in his country's doom.
Sees old consent, and public care,
Greet us with titles, arms deny;
And sends his banish'd bands to share
A friendship may for ever live;
While to the land which own'd our sways,
Their names alike (if such be praise)
The foes of other ages give.

ACT III.

Alfred, Chorus.

Chor. Cease we our music, and th' approaching
king
Triumphant welcome. Hail, long wish'd-for
monarch!

Whether thou come instructed of our tale,
Or following but the guidance of high heav'n,
Permit me to conduct——

Alf. I heard it late
From Mervin, as along the rear I pass'd,
Its posture to survey. He told me, too,
Where I might find, in perilous repose,
Th' expecting queen, and spares me your assist-
ance. *[Exit into the cottage.*

Chorus.

Sem. Fain would I, friends, though late the
chief of Wales
Unquestion'd left us, yet, for what we did,

Now gain the approbation of our king.
 And now, perhaps, the difference of our cause
 Needs new directions, since our sovereigns met,
 And what we came for is from neither hid.
 Back to return, for that we see 'tis so,
 Our bus'ness o'er, will be no task of ease.

Sem. Thy fears are just; for now alarm'd far
 round,

The country is inform'd of this attack,
 Though made in secret, on the Danes' intrench-
 ments;

And if their scatter'd tribes espy the queen,
 Who, when we hither past, obstructed not,
 Yet waken'd by mistrust, our cautious progress,
 We may lament our own dishonour'd office,
 Nor less, as Britons, her captivity.

Sem. But if new tribes, which daily fear fore-
 sees,

Have sought our coast, and deluge now the isle,
 Then tenfold is the danger. Hapless England,
 Should this momentous interval of safety,
 When Alfred would restore our stranded hopes,
 Be ravish'd by invasion's refluent tide,

And to a future time, perhaps for ever,
The period, wish'd by Britons, still deferr'd,
Of prosp'rous law, and undisturb'd repose!—
Is there no castle near, dismantled late,
Where we may more securely guard the queen?

Sem. None do I see; and only the remains
Of ample walls, religion's sacred seat,
And ruin'd churches. Yet 'twere better so,
Than thus surrounded by the war to stay,
Fearing each wind that shakes the neighb'ring
boughs :

There, while against the diligence of foes
We haste to strengthen the deserted spot,
The timid herd, that crop the weedy courts,
Or 'scape the summer-sun beneath the cloister,
Shall at our strange appearance stand erect,
With lifted antlers, and our near approach
Starting t' avoid, for their relinquish'd wilds
Again resign his residence to man.

Sem. Soft—'tis the creaking hinge, that haply
speaks

The royal pair advancing——Yes, they come.
Now shall we best from Alfred learn to do

What prudence, less than heav'nly, recommends;
And, doing it, no less be justified.

But see, they slowly pace, and as immers'd
In deep discourse. Let us more distant stand,
Lest interruption mar their intercourse;
And, when they part, we will detain the king
With provident inquiry, ere he go.

Alfred, Elsitha, Chorus at a distance.

Alf. Yes, my Elsitha (be to Heav'n the praise!)
Now hast thou prosper'd in thy embassy,
Imparting what concern'd us near, both me,
And all my people. They shall much re-
 joice;
Yet 'twill not be without some mingled sorrow
For the surrounding dangers of their queen.

Els. Much, Alfred, then, much surely has
 she mourn'd,
If it be such an evil to Elsitha,
Her constant partnership in toils and sorrow,
And anxious labour in her hourly care.
When chance condemn'd thee once to lonely woe;
Much was it, sure, to me the cause of triumph,

That absence from thy sufferings forc'd me not
To share thy troubles, and t' assuage thy grief.

Alf. O, dwell not on that chance, whose
 strangeness oft

Has furnish'd matter for the soldiers' tales,
But not less oft entic'd thy ready tears.
Now, that our cause requires the force of hope,
Seek we each argument of cheering sort,
And bar each distant access to despondence.

Els. Shall I reflect on thy debas'd estate,
When fortune made thee vassal of a vassal,
Serving the aged housewife of a cot,
And then dismiss the thought, as each desires?
The sigh, to nature due, at least be paid.
Shall I indifferent muse on the commands
Giv'n, as she left the shed, over the flame
To tend her food; which, when thou didst neglect,
Rapt, and attentive to thy bow and darts,
The loud-ton'd anger of the poorest told,
But too well told, anon, thy sad reverse?

Alf. Such tales reserve, t' enhance the dear,
 bought palm
Of slow-pac'd victory; but forbear we now

To baffle ardour with discouragement:
 When peace returns to glad us, then may we
 Joy, from the bosom of domestic quiet,
 To trace, with recollection's pleasing aid,
 Th' eventful series of our past misfortunes;
 Mark'd by the listening circle of an offspring,
 Not doom'd to mourn their lost inheritance.

Els. Let the tale rather stimulate to shun
 The joyless repetition of disgrace;
 To weigh again my wish, and far remove
 From climes where skulking treason braves de-
 tection,
 Thysel, and that endanger'd family.

Alf. It could not be; I could not have consented,
 Once has the voice of honour, wak'd by zeal
 For England's welfare, and for Alfred's fame,
 Refus'd thee: Grieve not that 'tis obstinate.
 But whither would'st thou that we bear, Elsitha,
 Our vagrant steps?

Els. Inventive love shall tell.
 Yes, with the pilgrims we will throng the ways
 Of mighty Rome, and in its holy walls
 Wear out the blameless remnant of our days

In honour'd ease. No spleenful tongue shall say
 That Alfred, daunted with the risks of war,
 Slunk to th' inactive cloister; but all own
 What dire necessity, by Heav'n's decree,
 Compell'd a hero's flight—depos'd a monarch.
 Thus, heap'd with honours earn'd, thy martial
 harvest,

Shalt thou look back well pleas'd upon thy life,
 And for the future soothe thee with the hopes
 Of best success to our united labours,
 Charm'd with an offsprings' ever-opening minds.
 Those wondrous fruits of art which won thy
 youth,

And, thou would'st say, were Greece's vengeful
 arms,

That quell'd her victor, Rôme, they shall delight,
 Revisited; as when a pope foretold thee,
 Anointing as he spoke, reserv'd for empire.
 What change were ill for me? since ev'n this cot,
 Were he secure, with Alfred were a kingdom.

Alf. Alas! my best belov'd, whate'er thou
 say'st,

Tends to dissuade me more; for when I think

Of Rome, and all that help'd t' increase its glories,
 The pride of art in spoils of conquer'd nations,
 And its own warlike deeds, or peaceful triumphs,
 Can I do else than hail the distant years,
 When the like fortune shall our efforts crown?
 Yes, on the Thames another Rome shall rise;
 So prosp'ring, my Elsitha, and so held,
 For wide extent, and for unrivall'd numbers,
 Earth's capital. There patronage bestow'd
 Shall waken nature's fair propensities:
 The canvas there shall glow, the labour'd stone
 Swell with the truth of life; the pile ascend;
 And heav'nly harmony entrance the soul.

Els. And so thou said'st, when, wrapt in hostile fire,
 The city late bow'd all her battlements,
 And lay one mighty ruin. "Yes, at least,"
 Drying th' involuntary tear, thou said'st,
 "Henceforth, at least, it shall be own'd, to me
 "Her origin is due, when luxury's pomp
 "On London sheds a splendor yet unknown,
 "Her streets adorns, and throngs her theatres."
 Such was thy talk; and labour swift obey'd thee:

But what is now his progress? Interruption,
Sent, the resistless messenger of war,
Suspends his earliest works, and mars thy pro-
jects.

Religion, Alfred, nay, religion's self
Opposes thee; reminding of thy crosses,
While she persuades thee to despair of conquest,
And own, as if declar'd, the will of heav'n.

Alf. Let us beware we construe no appearance
Of unintention'd chance the will of heav'n,
Ev'n erring with a heart of innocence;
Nor, superstitious, thwart the virtuous aim
Of patient fortitude, or vent'rous valour.
When man is kindled by some noble view
To dang'rous toil, heav'n disapproves th' at-
tempt

If 'tis superior to his bravest efforts;
But is it less, it bids him persevere.

Els. Remember'st thou that time, that ill-
starr'd time,
When both our reign and early love began;
For since, ten tedious years have past, of pain
To us, and to our infant family,

Scarce has one interval of peaceful ease
 Cheer'd us, so long amid continued threats
 And inroads of the Dane; and shall we now
 Act o'er again the mournful part assign'd us,
 Depriv'd for ever of domestic rest?
 Methinks, near some lone wood, or haunted
 stream,

Where only fairies revel, we might welcome
 A peasant's lot: there but begin to live;
 There taste the dulcet draughts of fearless union,
 And know a parent's joys. My duteous care
 Might win oblivion's succour, charming far
 Thy consciousness of sad obscurity.

Now dost thou haste t' expose a precious life
 To conqu'ring Pagans; I, unguarded, brave—

Alf. Yet Mervin told me he had left but now
 Sufficient force to guard thee from assault;
 And if it be so, better may'st thou spare
 My absence; for I hear the shouts resound
 Of newly-kindled strife. Perhaps these followers,
 Who staid without, may tell us what has chanc'd.
 Say, friends, has Mervin plied you with fresh
 aid?

Chor. Yes, sire, and usefully we posted it
Where his consent, confirming the advice
We had before receiv'd, directed us.
Thou see'st their glittering arms.

Alf. Ha! whose advice?
Who bade you so defenceless leave the queen,
And send these troops so far without her call?

Chor. My liege, 'twas Ceoluph, whose will
prevail'd
To reinforce those passes, which of late
He deem'd most dangerous, as apart retir'd,
To hold, he said, some conference pre-ordain'd,
He waited Mervin; and th' arriving prince
Seem'd to confirm the counsel he had giv'n.

Els. I had from Ethelred myself the promise,
That he would send the prince attended thus
With needful succour.

Alf. And I here conferr'd
With Ceoluph, appointed first by message;
Since just solicitude for England's cause
Warn'd me with jealous eye t' observe his actions.

Chor. Alas! then all is plain, and we deceiv'd.
When first we saw that lord, he told us here

He should anon receive a prince's orders :
 But when we spoke our joy thou would'st arrive,
 And told him of the queen, conceiving straight,
 I fear, some dark design, he damp'd our hopes,
 Explaining now, that 'twas the chief of Wales;
 Yet promis'd he to speak of our distress,
 While we should (which he begg'd) awhile retire :
 And soon his vassal, who with us retir'd,
 Was call'd; and following shortly, we return'd
 To hear his flattering promise of assistance.
 We doubted then his word, and boasted friend-
 ship :

But when, dispatch'd by Ethelred, with aid
 Mervin arriv'd, we then dismiss'd our scruples,
 And scarce exchang'd one word to clear this dark-
 ness,

So readily the mind, when once convinc'd
 By any strange appearance, bends all others
 To suit it, nor can doubt them. Pardon, sire.

Alf. All is most true. The vassal's tim'd re-
 turn,

And silence, which, instructed of the queen,
 He yet observ'd, prove plain conspiracy,

And, as I deem, and rumour holds, some league
With Ireland's neighb'ring aids.

Chor. Sire, we conjure thee,
Direct us.

Alf. Mervin bade me, as he past,
Not disregard his words, but shun the snares
Of Ceoluph; yet thought I not so near——
Straight let some call those guards, and to her
 chariot

The rest conduct the queen. I fly t'insure
Her wish'd retreat. *[Exit hastily.]*

Elsitha, Chorus, Woman.

Els. Stay, Alfred. Oh!—

Chor. Attend—

Support her fainting frame, thou aged matron.
Be near——Untoward chance!—But she revives!

Els. Afford, good friend, the hospitable shelter
Of thy adjoining roof, that so thy cares
Soon may recall my dissipated spirits.
One moment pause—then slowly lead me on.

[*Exeunt together.*]

Chorus.

Chor. How sad distress accumulates, my friends!
 What noise was that? The thicket sounds with
 arms,
 With moving arms, and nigh us. Heav'n forbid
 They should prevent our aids, who now I see
 Too distant, though they sweep with earnest
 speed,
 Over yon slope approach us. Yes, the foes,
 Well favour'd by the thicket's dusky veil,
 Mournful calamity! crept noiseless on,
 And, see, surround us!

Ceoluph, Soldiers, Chorus.

Ceol. Guards, yield up your charge;
 And be the queen, ye boast to serve, henceforth
 My prisoner, and my hostage. For this prize
 I seek reward from the prevailing Dane
 Beyond the power of your successful monarch:
 Then yield to happier fortune, and the art
 Of higher policy. But what! ye dare

[*They draw their swords.*]

Grasping your swords (and vainly do ye grasp
them),

Oppose what I decree?

Chor. Nor shall resign,
Till every means prove feeble to defend,
(And we of this secure) whom 'tis our duty
Ev'n with our lives to guard.

Ceol. Can I dissuade
Your rashness? Eye these wide-extended files.
Then say if rage be prudence?

Chor. 'Tis most true,
Superior force is thine, and we must yield;
Yet does hope still with feeble glimmering cheer
us;

Perhaps reflection may suggest what reverence
A virtuous king demands,—a king thyself
Hast serv'd with loyalty.

Ceol. And what this king,
Who treated slightingly my offers fair
Of service, and retains less worthy friends.
But that I liv'd his subject, and content,
O think it not, nor tarnish thus the glory
Which from the faithful intercourse I draw

That leagues me with the Dane, and long has
leagu'd me.

His heav'n-supported arms obtain'd my favour,
Obtain'd my aid. Ye vainly would resist him,
Though from a thousand Athelneys ye pour'd,
Tir'd of misfortune's miserable shifts :

Too wide has conquest's arm establish'd power.

Chor. We thought thou hadst deny'd th' im-
puted actions

Which wrong accusers would persuade us of,
And blam'd aloud the baseness of mistrust.

Geol. In sooth, 'twas well to temporize, and
watch,

Arm'd with mock proofs of false fidelity,
A rash pretender's motions, and wild hopes.

Yet know, I boast of the successful art
That could secure th' advent'rous Dane his
right,

That right which conquest ever gives the brave :
Less noble ends might sanctify the deed.

But mark, attentive—Look ye that no word
Be utter'd, pointing to outrageous insult,
Or any ill-advis'd attempt. Such an offence

Your forfeit lives shall expiate:—caution'd thus,
I leave ye. [*Exit.*

Chorus.

Sem. In what refuge shall the peace
Of sad Elsitha shelter from the storm?
How shall we break its force? which she, alas!
Too soon may feel o'erwhelm her sinking spirit,
Instructed of the chance. Has art ingredients
With which to sweeten the distasteful cup,
Cheering beneath despair? If thou can'st counsel,
Delay not.

Sem. Yes, to music's aid, my friends,
Let us resort, and fortify the mind
With soothing sound, ev'n against certain pain;
Yet lest, by mirth enfeebled, it forbid
Familiar to support misfortune's glance,
Be our sad theme the country which sends forth
The foes who here surround us, and the song
What first the British minstrel wak'd to mourn,
The recent fortune of that neighb'ring land.

Sem. And when your plaintive strain has ceas'd,
shall some

Discover to the queen, by slow degrees,
That mournful fate prudence would now withhold.

SONG.

O nations, urg'd by hostile fate,
To brave, in adverse ranks, the war,
Taught Heaven's mild lore, nor mov'd of late
The Pagan victor's arts t' abhor;
For ever quench your kindled rage,
And, ah! no more that vengeance waste,
Doom'd for the impious head above,
Or bear at length, with rival haste,
Such lenient aid of peaceful love
As may its ling'ring ills assuage.

Oft as the year, from winter freed,
Levels the surge, and guides the gales,
New fleets decree the south to bleed,
With threat'ning prows, and swelling sails.
Keen rapine, selfish treach'ry, there,
And cruelty, to hell's affray
Inviting, o'er their vot'ries lowr:
Are these, ah! vanquish'd Eirin, say,

The mortals, or each patron power
A god, whose glory claims thy care.

Aw'd is thy tongue, but not those eyes,
Indignant at the galling chain;
They speak, as Britain's self, of ties
That mutual may your sons maintain
In endless union, blest and free.

Whence the fair isles, with strength combin'd,
Shall happiness, in every land,
From arms protect, and wrong design'd,
And, amid waves securely stand,
The citadels of liberty.

ACT IV.

Chorus.

Chor. We must perforce break off; for, see,
not far

The chief approaching; and behind him comes
One whom he haply to the care allots
Of the ill-starr'd Elsitha. Now, behold,
Stretching his hand, he presses on to speak.

Ceoluph, Dane, Chorus.

Ceol. Instant resign the prisoner, whom ye
serve,

To the safe custody of this new guard;
The author of such valiant deeds this day
Wrought in so fair a cause. Yield her to him,
Whose faith shall raise to trust, which better far
Comports with such rare merit, than your claims,
Seditious traitors! who, with whisp'rings here,
Aim to corrupt the allies of the Dane,
Surrounding ye; and with rebellious harps,

Enkindling discontent, assay their truth.

But well shall ye henceforth be mark'd in mischief,

And fail of its intent ; observ'd by one

Whose presence shall importunately guard ye.

[*Exit.*

Dane, Chorus.

Chor. We yield, as we are bid, our charge;
but hope

That mild behaviour, and respectful treatment,

The dues both of her sex and lofty station,

Your office, unconfin'd, will grant a queen.

Dane. Fear not more hardship than that office
bids;

And it enforces only the sure care

Of watchfulness, and just fidelity.

Thy queen perhaps is here.

Chor. Though ill-prepar'd,

Indeed, to bear this shew of hostile harshness,

Which with thy courteous meaning unexplain'd,

Ere yet the shock of her surprise abate,

And firmer nerves assist, may cause regret.

Dane. Has she so ill sustain'd the chance of
war?

Chor. If 'tis no treason to your cause to tender
The medicinal aid of heavenly music
To pining sickness, and fear-vanquish'd beauty,
Then, then believe, we merit not the taunt
Experienc'd from this lord, and woke our harps
To quiet pain, but not to kindle passion:
Ignorant, alas! if now death's icy hand
Extend not o'er the queen, and every moment
Threaten existence with its mortal touch.
Does sympathy with female helplessness,
Which on this earth is most observ'd t' inhabit
The bosom of the brave, inhabit thine?
Let me, then, first forewarn her with the tale,
And gradual break the cause that brings thee
hither,
What orders thou was told to execute,
Whence com'st: she then may seek thy inter-
view.

Dane. That busy youth, among my brother
Danes,
Oft kept me in this land, or brought me hither.

Intent to ravage uncontroll'd these fields
 Of fertile beauty, and to death devote
 The tender and defenceless, this will scarce
 Furnish a needful source of consolation;
 Yet may'st thou add, that time has gain'd me
 o'er

A proselyte to mercy's own religion,

Chor. Unlook'd-for chance! O, tell it—tell
 me all;

That sooth'd by every gleam of healing comfort,
 Which I may to her willing eyes unveil,
 She need not from the change receive alarm!
 What fortune won thee to our holy faith!

Dane. Know, I was of that hord, who, from
 the east,

With Sitric, Ivar, and their brother Amlave,
 Follow'd t' invade the fertile fields of Ireland,
 And made our landing good. Then, by degrees,
 We stretch'd our power, leaving no toil untry'd;
 For we employ'd not force alone, but art,
 And oft to the deluded natives seem'd
 But guests, who sought their hospitable shore,
 Averse from blood, and little mov'd by need.

This pleas'd them. To procure their fuller favour,

Mingling amidst their families, ere yet
The whole submitting isle had own'd our power,
And many a stubborn contest undeceiv'd them,
There were who scrupled not t' embrace their
faith.

More follow'd that example; and of these
Was I. Since when, it still was my endeavour
To blunt war's dreaded edge, and best t' unite
The duties of a Christian and a soldier.

Chor. Compell'd by thy superiors into war,
Perhaps thou find'st it difficult t' observe
The precepts mild thy judgment has approv'd?

Danc. I left them not, if e'er the times allow'd.

Oft have I from a brother warrior snatch'd
The wailing innocent, and timely stay'd
Th' uplifted sword. In these surrounding domes,
Raz'd to the ground, full many a holy man
Late ow'd his safety to my secret counsel,
Or needful mediation; which I spar'd not,
Glad to restrain the wild career of carnage,

Chor. And what intent brought thee to this
our country;

Bearing against its sons auxiliar arms?

Danc. Nor hope of spoil, nor base antipathy.
Ivar, when all things he had deem'd compos'd
In his new conquest, plann'd a swift descent,
With Hubba, that fierce Dane, whose standard
Pagans

Held as enchanted, and portentous hop'd
Upon the ill-protected shores of England:
For the three sisters of the chief had wove it
('Twas rumour'd) in one day, a raven's image,
Hence term'd the Raven. It awak'd high hopes
Through all his Pagan followers; but in vain.
Me, as for skill in arms, and deeds extoll'd,
He took to the successless enterprize;
Whence, flying late, I reach'd the Danish camp.
For need I tell th' event of that sad conflict
Upon the banks of Tau, with Devon's earl;
Where, all dispers'd, some to the ships betook
them;

The rest sought other wars, and Hubba fell?
O'er whom, performing fun'ral rites, we pil'd—

[*Noise of arms.*

Chor. What sound of neighb'ring strife arrests
thy tale?

Dane, Chorus, Woman.

Wom. O, say, did ye not hear some tumult,
friends,
That haply threats this unprotected mansion,
And that so precious life expos'd within?
Is it the battle's near approach?

Dane. 'Tis o'er:
The prompt assailants are repell'd again.

Chor. Tell our sad mistress, aged cottager,
No danger threatens. But does she now bear
Health more confirm'd than late; and has th' effect
Of swift depression, banish'd, left her frame
Less feeble, and less harass'd than before,
Or broods imprudent fancy o'er her sorrows?

Wom. Miraculous has been indeed the change.
Long did I vainly labour to restore,
With every means of anxious care, her strength;
When looking on her soon, I view'd her rapt
In pleasing contemplation. First her eye
Betray'd new life, and next her alter'd cheek;
Vigour and wonted motion then ensu'd.

Silent she sate, yet casting often upward
 A pensive glance, that spoke no idle mind.
 Methinks religion thus avail'd, to chase
 Despair, and every hindrance which it brought,
 To the swift step of her recovery;
 For, steel'd by resignation, she seems borne
 In thought high above earth, and earthly cares,
 And holding sweet communion with the blest.

Chor. Then is our purpose favour'd by the
 time.—

Tell her that, fall'n into the pow'r of foes,
 We must transfer our charge to him we see.
 Say, that he sues his audience: yet say, too,
 By birth a Dane, he comes from neighb'ring
 Ireland;

Whose faith, adopted for his own, directs him
 By milder laws.

Wom. 'Tis mournful—But I go. [Exit.

Dane, Chorus.

Chor. Thus, with sincere submission to high
 heaven,
 Our sovereigns temper their instructive lives.

Not, like licentious bigotry, still ready
 With new repentance to efface omission :
 They suit th' unchanging tenor of their days
 To inward piety ; which so they prove,
 Doing it honour among frail-born men :
 And less such lives need sacred dispensation.
 It is the prayer of England, she may oft
 So boast the pattern of a spotless court,

Dane. And may such merit not escape due
 notice

From my superiors ; for what I can do,
 (Which honour and good faith forbid me not,
 Entrusted as a soldier with your charge)
 To better her estate, on that depend.

Chor. But see, the queen herself comes forth
 to seek thee.

Elsitha, Dane, Chorus.

Els. Welcome is here thy presence, courteous
 stranger :

Nor wilt thou find the exercise of office
 Or thwarted by objection's wayward scruples,
 Or an unwilling mind. That we profess

Like faith, and like regard of mercy's dictates,
 (Though thou art o'er me plac'd, an hostile guard)
 For that do I give thanks, with grateful heart,
 To Him who is the common lord and ruler
 Of warring nations, and divided tribes.

Thou com'st from Ireland's coast. Oft have I
 mus'd

With secret pleasure on its favour'd fields;
 Where many a solemn structure rears its height,
 The school and seat of Christian piety.

Thence does the sable-vested inmate roam
 Full oft to neighb'ring lakes, o'erhung with
 shade,

And cherish contemplation, with the charms
 Of soothing silence, and neglected nature;
 Growing devouter, while celestial forms
 Rise unimpeded to his ravish'd sight.

Long has it been the very nursery
 Of our blest faith, this goodly land; and hence
 'Tis call'd the Isle of Saints, by Christian Europe.

[*A noise.*

Chor. Again that mingled sound——

Dane. Princess, I go

Constrain'd; not far, with waving hand, the
chief

Who brought me hither, warns me to his presence.

I shall not long be absent; and, mean while,
Our common Deity watch o'er thy fate! [*Exit.*

Elsitha, Chorus.

Chor. O, queen, with better hopes I scan our
fortunes,

(Though sad its aspect) since this guard discovers
With fav'ring ear he listen'd to the speech
By which I to thy suffering virtue guided
His chain'd attention. Then shew'd he full plain
Th' involuntary look of new regard,
For thee, and for thy lord; speaking as friendly.
Despair not, ransom, unoppos'd by hate,
May quick restore thee to thy progeny;
Into the docile mind t' instil again
Right royal precepts; and again prepare them
For actions and a rank their birth demands.

Els. Whate'er befall us, I no more repine;
Or howe'er Providence dispose events.

Is't not their guardian Power, who, from its
 airy,
 Sends forth the fearless eaglets, to extend
 Unpractis'd plumes, with wonted awe to fill
 Inferior birds, and wing the subject air?
 Each blessing, or each curse, from him be hail'd!

Elsitha, Dane, Chorus.

Dane. Would that more grateful news, re-
 spected princess,
 Were mine t' unfold to thy attentive ear,
 Crowning solicitation with success;
 And not the story, rather, of worse woe
 Than thou art arm'd t' endure by expectation,
 Ev'n in sad times. I ask'd of Ceoluph
 Favours a captive might not blush to crave:
 Abruptly did that lord reply, and say,
 'Twas not now time to cherish apprehensions
 Of aught, save of the foe; his second charge
 Scarce over, while our front ill bore the onset.
 Retreat grew needful, and of this he warns thee:
 Bidding to follow, but with two of these—
 No larger number: for the rest, to leave them.

He must not be endanger'd in his schemes,
He says, by enemies conniving near.

Chor. Soldier, retract thy speech, or, oh! at
least,

With virtuous disobedience win more praise,
Than could performance of injurious duty.
O, set the queen at large, or take her train!

Els. Forbear——

Dane. Most positive are my commands,
Nor brooking interruption, nor delay;
And our retreating troops, already come,
Warning us hence.

Els. I follow where thou lead'st.

Chor. Thou wilt not, haply, though denying
much——

Thou wilt not fail, at our desire, t' observe
That fiery lord, and through the battle shun
His dang'rous presence.

Dane. Honour must approve
What I, herein to serve you, chance t' effect.

[*Dane exit, and Queen unmoved, Chorus weeping.*]

Chorus.

Sem. Let us behind these crowded trunks
 give room,
 Unnotic'd, to th' impassion'd combatants,
 And wait them.

*[The Irish retreat across the stage, pursued by
 the Welch and English.]*

Now they pass us, and move on.
 How swiftly do those fly, and these pursue,
 With mended pace, each moment, o'er the
 ground!
 Victorious are indeed our troops in battle,
 But not so is our cause, while held remote,
 The prize of enemies, the fair Elsitha,
 England's bright honour, and our much-lov'd
 mistress,

Accompanies an host of foes, enrag'd
 At adverse strife, with their imperious leader;
 And, as our arms more pow'rfully prevail,
 With so much quicker progress she recedes.

Sem. Perhaps no more will she be seen again,
 Following to miserable haunts her lord,

Where his unhappy country's cause requir'd
him:

No more receive him there, from toilsome war;
There soothe his sorrow, there support with him,
Array'd in sordid garb, the pains of hunger;
Found with the foremost of that patriot group,
Which form'd the doleful picture of distress.
Can we again aspire, my friends, to see them,
Unequall'd pair! when pinching want oppresses,
When o'er their squalid forms as plain appears
The signs of misery, as we beheld them late,
Reach from the threshold to th' imploring beggar,
The last poor remnant of their wretched food?
Then did the river, as by heav'n's command,
Yield plenteous recompence; but did they more
Deserve, than every day we bless?—than now?

Sem. What means this wonder? Our associate
here,

Breathless with haste!

Chorus, Attendant.

Attend. Advance the chariot straight,
The queen is rescu'd, and the battle ours!

Some go, and hither urge the ling'ring steeds.

[*Some go out.*]

Chor. Say how it chanc'd?—Most fortunate
event!

Attend. Slow, as we pass'd, and moving in
the troop

Who flank'd the utmost rear, in dread t' advance
To that disloyal chieftain, our betrayer,
(Who hence, enrag'd, had summon'd to his
presence

Our guard, and left us unattended there)
Far through the files a gallant band, though few,
Beheld it. With most unexampled daring,
Scarce credible, did they around us stand,
Like sudden phantoms, and upbore the queen,
While the surprise, yet rife, befriended them;
Till urg'd at length, or hurried by the crowd,
All found a distant and secure repose;
And, looking back, we saw the routed foe.

Chor. 'Tis certain. But observe, where late
we gaz'd,

The field, both by the victors and the vanquish'd,
Is left deserted, cover'd but by slain;

The rest have mov'd far off. Yet, though releas'd,
 Be not too confident the queen shall come
 Free from the neighbourhood of fierce confusion.
 Rejoice we; but reflect what chance may thwart
 her,
 Ere the steeds reach, or hence transport to safety.
 The wise ne'er triumph, blind to distant danger;
 Nor wait th' event despairing. That new strain,
 Inspir'd by this day's first success, mean while
 Shall, in exulting sounds, attest our joy.

SONG.

Heard by the Scotian prince with joy
 So late, resounded o'er his hall
 By tuneful bards, th' amaze of all,
 Our deeds shall more exulting chords employ,
 And friendship's wakeful ear recall.
 "Blest be the day," they sang, "th' auspi-
 cious day,
 " When strong resistance curb'd our foes;
 " When, seen conspicuous o'er his vanquish'd
 clay,
 " The funeral mound of Hubba rose.

- “ Ye waves, that lash the lofty shore
 “ Whence his returning squadron flew,
 “ Ye might not Britain’s virtue view
 “ Alone; but from the grotts of ocean hoar,
 “ Far, far remote, on labour new
 “ Intent; her chief obscur’d in base attire
 “ His warlike limbs, and bore the charms
 “ Of music to the haunt of licence dire,
 “ That fury throng’d with adverse arms,

 “ Pleas’d at his mirthful mood, and pleas’d
 “ At his soft harp’s bewitching tone,
 “ (While he each secret spied unknown)
 “ The warriors cherish the sweet bane, that
 “ eas’d
 “ The heart of care—yet, threat’ning shewn,
 “ Soon shall his myriads move from Selwood’s
 “ glade.
 “ Near valour, bursting from the bands
 “ Of faint despondence, with resistless aid
 “ Obedient faith still ready stands.”

O, realm of ever-living strains!

Thus music breath'd her soft relief:

But, rather, now, the slaughter'd chief,
And banners wrested from th' astonish'd

Danes,

Of mystic woof, their fond belief
Of Alfred's tale, and his successful wiles

Chant to thy harps; for, doom'd to cease,
Now first has battle, with propitious smiles,
Usher'd the blest approach of peace.

ACT V.

Chorus.

Chor. Heav'ns! see I not approaching near,
alone,

The comrade who remain'd? 'Tis but too true.
I seek in vain the queen; and doubtless, now,
That air, and hand against his forehead press'd,
Denote some direful change. Soon shall we
know.

Chorus, Attendant.

Attend. Mourn, ye who trembled for your
expos'd mistress,
That fate has snatch'd her from our guard again.

Chor. Scarce need I wish develop'd more thy
tale,
Since worse thou can'st not say.

Attend. Soon as at length
The queen shook off th' effect of that surprise
Wrought by her bold deliverance, we espied

Upon the left-hand steep, and farther on,
 A neighb'ring gateway, where a convent once
 Arose, but by the Danes long since destroy'd;
 It now but form'd the outworks of their camp.
 Hither we bent our course, and hop'd to join
 Th' expected car, resting awhile unseen :
 For towards the right, beneath the self-same
 hill,

The tide of battle flow'd, and mov'd away—
 Mov'd, as we thought, away : yet did we err;
 All soon beheld th' impetuous Ceoluph,
 Who circled the same height in swift retreat,
 Pour in his followers through a distant gate.
 Our fate was then before our eyes, and each
 Look'd at the other with despondent gaze.
 Helpless we ponder'd on the angry spirit
 Our late escape might waken, and had borne
 Suspense but ill, yet shrunk from certainty,
 Fear'd in his threat'ning aspect.

Chor. What ensued?

Attend. When seen, like eagles did the chiefs
 approach us,
 Inclosing with inevitable arms;

Then turn'd, and at that narrow pass prepar'd
To front the foes, and to embitter sorrow.

Chor. Mean'st thou the queen, from wanton-
ness of pow'r,

Bore aught of insult?

Attend. She, alas! o'erwhelm'd
By grief, when last constrain'd I sought you forth,
Lay motionless, so dire a scene of death
Afflicted her!

Chor. Of death? Pursue thy tale.

Attend. Th' un pitying lord, as 'twere to ex-
cite them, too,

By the strong spur of fierce severity,
Bade each attend his words. " Too much," he
cry'd,

" Our lenity has borne, too easy made

" The task of triumph o'er indulgent goodness.

" Let beauty and let majesty confess it,

" I have been kind. I spar'd their state at-
tendants,

" And they but turn the arms I gave against me.

" Quit, then, thy mistress, and to Alfred tell,

" That henceforth safe I shall convey my hostage

“ Beyond his busiest search. Say, too, the Dane
 “ Who leagu’d with you, and faithless to his
 “ trust,
 “ Resign’d his charge, attains not Ireland’s fa-
 “ vour;
 “ Her sons full gladly see him undergo
 “ Due punishment; and, by the just example,
 “ Their conscious worth is rous’d to nobler
 “ deeds.”

He spoke, and to the veteran soldier flew,
 And smote him. Turning then, he look’d
 around,

Expecting sure applause; but through the ranks
 A general murmur spread, as they beheld
 Their fav’rite leader dying, if death truly
 Guided the blade. He fell, and, as he lay,
 Oft with faint voice protested innocence.

Chor. Alas! that virtue should, to mortal eyes,
 Seem so begirt with ills, and Heav’n’s high ways,
 Inexplicable, spite of reason, pain us!
 We hop’d that to this soldier was decreed
 An honour’d peaceful age, so well deserv’d
 By that humanity he shew’d of late,

That tender sympathy for others' sufferings.

Didst thou then hither straight direct thy course?

Attend. Yes; then, amid the throngs who
barr'd the entrance,

I won my way to bring this piteous tale.

Chor. O how should we now suffer, did he
come,

Our august sovereign's unsuspecting glance?

How would our tongue perform its arduous office,

First to unfold——

Alfred, Followers, Chorus.

Alf. Haste, lead me to the queen:

And let her, in new tidings, read her safety.

The enemy's main force, reduc'd by slaughter,

And harass'd by pursuit, which ours maintain

With strength renew'd, and undiminish'd num-
bers,

Follow their leaders to that distant castle

O'erlooking far the plain. They go, but vainly:

The gallant Ethelred so close pursues!

Sure of his power, he fears no tardy siege.

Mean while I hither came, lest any chance

Should have detain'd you here, and need my
presence.

But wherefore is this silence? why does doubt
Of what I speak appear to check your triumph?

Chor. We are compell'd to say the worst,

The queen

Is seiz'd; and yonder proof may seem sufficient
To shew the day too incompletely gain'd.

Preceded, see, and follow'd as their prisoner,
The royal Mervin winds along the path,
Among his foes, approaching to this spot.

Alfred, Mervin, and Irish, Chorus.

Alf. Grasp, Englishmen, prepar'd, your sav-
ing weapons,

And win from hostile hands the noble prisoner.

[*They draw.*

Merv. Alfred, thou aptly might'st surmise
that I,

Hemm'd round with weapons, reeking with the
life-blood

Of my own followers, meet thee here a prisoner.
But know, far different is the cause that brings me,

And brings too these.

Alf. Say'st thou? what other cause?

Merv. This fierce parade, marking severe constraint;

These following and preceding arms, may wrongly
Shew such injoin'd to spy my guarded actions,
As but obey my will.

Alf. Insulting prince!

I note how friendly to thy hopes they come.
And dost thou mean with taunting to assist
The stings of thy defection, which esteem
Of thy suppos'd desert, through disappointment,
Perhaps enough would arm. Yet am I us'd
To crosses sad as these. The clouds that hover
O'er these first years of my tumultuous reign,
Have not spread total night,—not yet extinguish'd
Each spark of loyal firmness: yet by many,
By far too many, fearing for my cause,
Have I been left. Their treachery——

Merv. Hear me, Alfred;
And of this new appearance learn the reason.

Alf. E'en on this day such stratagems, as long
Fruitless have prov'd, again have threaten'd ruin:

Yet look'd I not for more, now that success
Display'd innumerable hosts in flight.

Our favour'd arms deceiv'd me: Say from whence,
What villages, what mountain-streams of Wales
Brought'st thou betime those legions, who must
change

The fortune of the day, and second these
Thy myrmidons? or tell me, is it thou
That hold'st in stern captivity our queen?

Merv. The queen is free, and by this sword
enlarg'd,

That slew the traitor Ceoluph.

Alf. Amazement!

What say'st thou? Fate forbid thy words mislead:
And pardon, if it err, my swift suspicion.

Merv. In th' undreamt changes of irregular
fight,

Sudden, before us, parted from the rest,
Did we descry a troop, in whom, full plainly,
One shone in arms, whose liberty were danger,
That Ceoluph. His person to possess,
And humble his battalion, we essay'd
Round them, ere aided by the distant Dane,

To draw our circle of superi^{or} numbers.
 But seeing us, they fled. From shapeless walls,
 A convent once, the remnant of barbarians,
 They sought protection, and, by these debarr'd,
 Did we resign our hope; yet on the gate
 Directed all our fury. There we stood.
 Strife then arose, and rag'd with mutual wounds.
 At once, soon as the battle's ardour seem'd
 To suffer pause, forth stepping from the crowd,
 In act t' encourage them, the lord advanc'd.
 I mark'd his boastful speech, and sprang to meet
 him.

To those behind I then with signs made known
 My purpose; but he warn'd not thus alike
 His men to rest aloof, and urg'd them onward.
 As from disgust, withholding prompt obedience,
 They left him to the combat. Shame at length
 Rouz'd him to dare my heav'n-assisted steel.

Alf. Thou bring'st clear proof of ever-faithful
 valour :

But wherefore thus accompanied?

Merv. In place
 Of newly-waken'd vengeance, looking up,

I found but in the countenance of all
 Who stood oppos'd, the cheering glance of favour.
 Within the gateway, with inviting voice
 They beckon'd me, where, prostrate on the ground,
 Welt'ring in blood, an aged soldier lay,
 Whom by the tyrant struck their tongue declar'd,
 Not slain, for unexpected life just then
 Illum'd his faded features. Acts like this,
 And agents so detested, they declin'd
 Henceforth t' uphold, bidding me to thy station
 Conduct them. From thy bounty they implore
 The friendly refuge of a Christian clime,
 And freedom in thy country from the yoke
 That galls their own.

Alf. And do our arms not risk
 Some other obstacle, some check, save these
 The welcome natives of a friendly land,
 Who heighten ancient love with reconciliation?
 Timely spectators of the work they come
 Which means to spread that peace their faith ap-
 proves.

Merv. All fear is groundless now. On the
 clear'd field

The queen remains alone, with those besides,
The few collected round her.

Alf. She there stays?

Merv. She does. When first, in search of
thee employ'd

I left her, mercifully seem'd her thoughts,
All bent on the assuagement of those pangs
The warriors wounds excite, and his life's surety.
Beside a fountain, wasting now its stores,
Frequented once by the sad brotherhood,
To slake their thirst, or household wants supply,
She stood. Compliant hands, at her command,
Lav'd off the clotted stream, and on his face
Sprinkled the cooling wave. Not unrewarded
Does heavenly condescension stoop thus low,
And surer health at every moment soothes
Her gratitude.

Alf. Then did she aught experience
Of favour, that should move her to be grateful?
Perhaps her sufferings by this pitying foe
Were lighten'd.

Merv. That they were she oft avows,
And o'er and o'er denies she can forget it,

Withholding equal aid from him who suffers
But in her cause, of late her generous guard.
Let thy victorious presence greet her view,
As might some angel, dropt from seats of bliss,
Rewarding virtue. Listen first, then go.

Alf. What would'st thou farther speak?

Merv. 'Tis known already
That Cadellh and myself, the younger sons
Of Roderick, lord of Wales, who left between us
Its southern parts submitted to thy sway :
And now let me unfold what Anarawd,
Our elder brother, wills ;—by thy success
Releas'd from awe of armies on his frontiers,
Who bids me say, sending thee word, henceforth
He means to join our league, and place alike
Beneath thy rule his northern provinces.

Alf. 'Tis true. Success has far transcended
hopes,
That, ere this day were harbour'd for our cause,
Our long unhappy cause; and Fortune smiles,
Show'ring her favours with unsparing hand.
Now does the island, south of Tweeda's stream,
Unbid confess that rule, invasion crush'd;

And all beyond its bordering waves shall own
 The self-same master; the sagacious Gregory,
 As earnestly soliciting protection,
 Mindful what high advantage will redound
 To our domains, in lasting union join'd.
 But let us not, as dazzled by success,
 And prone to exultation, slight one care:
 Though ardour summon to th' invested rampart,
 Stay, first, and bear with thee my terms of peace.

Merv. I stay alone to listen and obey thee.

Alf. Say, that whoe'er, converted from the
 worship

Of Danish gods, shall own the Christian faith,
 Its useful precepts, and convincing truths,
 Through the whole hostile army, from this day,
 All shall partake the boon our will allots,
 Where Mercia's dukedom stretches over England
 Its central space, inclosing fertile fields,
 There we project th' intended colony,
 There purpose to distribute lands to all,
 That may be the reward of new belief.
 This let their leader know, the bold Godrune,
 Informing if his army so consent

To gain our favour, and embrace our faith.

All. All hail to Alfred, merciful as brave!

[*Exit Mervin.*

Alfred, Chorus, Soldiers.

Alf. For us, my English subjects, much remains :

'Tis our laborious task to found a state
First of all nations, on just reason's rules,
And on the base of genuine liberty ;
A state the pensive sage has wish'd—not seen :
For well ye know how long oppression's scourge,
Wav'd by th' unwearied hand of partial law,
Has curst the bleeding country, and the poor :
Well know 'tis time t'oppose to rampant power
The shield of still expected privileges.

All. Long Alfred live, the guardian of the
poor.

Alf. Yes, no more baffled through degenerate
custom,

But by new laws acquiring ten-fold vigour,
Now shall, with majesty reviv'd, be seen
Resplendent justice, and her dictates guide ;

As erst among our German forefathers.

Twelve men shall judge the accus'd, whate'er his
rank,

Of the like rank : as they pronounce, or judge,
Be he or duke, or baron, or less noted ;
Be it or daring crime, or light omission ;
Alike shall swift reward or punishment
Be duly dealt. No more, regretted henceforth,
Law's brightest weapon in disuse shall rust.

All. May we, and our descendants, long be
grateful.

Alf. Now let us safe exult, now safely feel
Th' enthusiast's ardour for our country's cause,
Secure of fav'ring Heav'n ; and every wreath
Anticipated, gratify reflection,
Whose lustre, in old times, your songs indite.

Chor. Long Alfred reign, to make those glo-
ries ours !

SONG.

Slow descending from the plains
Of liquid ether, and the peopled sky,
The converse of the blest resign'd,

Daughters of peace, th' inventive arts from
high

Smile sweet on their remember'd earth,
And balanc'd on the clouds, explore inclin'd
What guardian spirit, whence he reigns,
With beckoning hand, permitted from above,
And voice exulting, bade them speed
Round whom himself, and powers aerial love,
(To win the noblest realm decreed)
Their blessings wide t' extend, and wake their
fruits to birth.

Heav'nly harbingers of joy,
Come, and below, enchanting nearer, smile,
Stor'd with the secret skill ye boast,
Or wealth t' improve, or poverty beguile:
Come, and the trackless desert sow
With Autumn's yearly pride; but o'er the
coast,

Let commerce all her sons employ,
T' adorn with glories of remotest lands
Wide cities, your stupendous work.
For all things own, with well-instructed hands,

Each other's aid, ye leave to lurk
Unprais'd no genuine charm, no labour use-
less grow.

Not the thought-inspiring stream
Of fam'd Ilissus, or the sage's bowers;
Not Tibur's banks your steps attend;
'Twas Britain's genius to the bord'ring flowers
Of limpid Thames that call'd so long
Your radiant beauty, where in pride ascend
Augusta's towers, and neighb'ring gleam,
Or verdant paths divide the elms of Shene,
Or forests clothe the winding-shore;
What splendor then shall raise the vivid scene,
When you refinement's gladness pour,
And virtue decks the throne, and virtue earns
the song!

Alf. Yet ere I go, attend, and be it known
That Shifford is that destin'd spot from which
This salutary good must issue forth,
To charm the island with prosperity;
To Shifford hasten, whomsoe'er his country

Then may require; for now by freedom's laws
 Must the whole people send to that assembly
 The objects of its choice, to speak its will,
 And independently maintain its rights.
 Our bishops shall be there, with learning's light
 To guide our councils; there our earls and
 thanes,
 Presenting in their fate the fates of many,
 With power proportion'd to superior wealth,
 Shall guard the laws of property; and there
 Myself will o'er the different ranks preside.
 Thus shall we form one perfect whole, assembling
 In various orders, for the common welfare;
 And met, we shall enact each needful law,
 To equal what emergencies require.
 At Athelney, to celebrate our labours
 Supported there, construct we first a pile,
 A sacred monastery, famous long,
 With matin orisons, and vespers due,
 In honour of the Lord of victory:
 Hard by, a palace wide, in which we hope
 To take delight, and triumph in reflection,
 Who suffer'd there th' united woes of war,

We, and our family: for well I know
Ye hold them not alone of private moment
In a free state; but, as your family.
Mischance befalling them, befals you too.
But should you chance t' inquire what fond me-
morial

Shall speak at Shifford our deliberate councils,
And tell posterity our mighty work:
Know, time is the sure witness of desert;
Posterity shall best avail to tell
Those benefits themselves alone shall see.
And then, perhaps, shall legibly be seen
Aloft, inscrib'd on monumental stone,—
“ Here, in this place, by Britons still rever'd,
“ Here did our toiling fathers first assemble
“ T'establish that enduring government
“ Convulsions may have mov'd, and discord
 threat'ned;
“ While yet successive ages taught repentance,
“ And party, wiser grown, with self-command
“ Restrain'd her efforts, lifted by experience
“ Above the madd'ning zeal of vulgar mortals.
“ Some golden age arise, prepar'd by science,

“ When truth, unclouded, shall be seen by all,
“ And unanimity consist with freedom!”

Spread these good tidings, friends (which fame
may well

Blow o’er the earth); I bear them to your queen.

[*Exit.*

Chorus, Soldiers.

Chor. For ever honour’d be this day, which
gives us

Just liberty in a well order’d state.

Say, shall we not with courage now protect it?

All. We will preserve, or die in its defence.

THE END.

NOTES.

THE BATTLE, &c.

THIS subject is mentioned in a particular manner by Milton, in his List of Tragic Subjects, as far as relates to the principal event. Most of the facts pointedly alluded to, are equally founded on history, it having been intended to exhibit as clear a picture as possible of those dark times, and above all, to collect together every circumstance in the life of Alfred anywise remarkable, or interesting, as Racine endeavoured to do in his *Mithridate*. The authors chiefly consulted were the English historians, Leland's *History of Ireland*, Lord Littleton's *Henry II.* Bicknell's *Life of Alfred*, the *Saxon Chronicle*, and *Asser*. On the other hand, the plot, considered as to the mere relation of its parts, is imaginary.

Mervin.] There is nothing particular told of this prince in the *History of England*, but that he, and his brother Cadellh were tributary to

Alfred before the battle, and Anarawd their brother afterwards.

Ethelred.] He was called “ Princeps militiæ,” and for his long services, and great merit, was made Duke of Mercia by Alfred, to whose heroic daughter Ethelfleda, (called the English Zenobia) he was married.

Ceolwulf.] The name is so spelt in Tindal’s Rapin; in other histories, Ceolwulph. It was attempted in his character to observe the Horatian maxim of “ Famam sequere.”

Elsitha.] The letter (*w*) is dropt in this name, generally written Elswitha. Her beauty, accomplishments, and the mutual attachment subsisting between her and Alfred during his distress, as well as their early marriage, are recorded.

Chorus.] The reader of English plays alone will, since Mr. Mason’s admirable tragedies, have learned the meaning and use of the Chorus. I have adhered to his mode, though I had at one time thoughts of putting 1 *Attend.* at the beginning of the speeches of the Chorus, and 1st and 2d *Attend.* at the beginning of those of the Semi-

chorus, or Chorus, when the conversation is among the characters who compose it.

The songs were placed at the conclusion of the acts, from an idea conceived of letting the music continue between them.

Free as his own thoughts, &c.] These were Alfred's words.

When Arthur fill'd the island throne.] This first stanza is taken from a description in Geoffrey of Monmouth, of one of Arthur's battles with the Saxons, in which he alone, with his sword Caliburn, made a prodigious slaughter of the enemy.

Shifford.] In Oxfordshire. Athelney is much more known, where Alfred's situation has been compared to that of Marius, when hiding in the marshes. A Saxon record has descended to us, unless it was destroyed by the fire at the Museum, describing a meeting held at Shifford about this time, exactly upon the principle of the British constitution, and the government imagined by Cicero and Tacitus. William the Conqueror by no means founded the English government, though Mons. de Lolme very properly remarks

the wholesome energy it providentially received even from the violence of his institutions. It was the work of a prince who never conquered but to defend himself, who never extended his dominions by conquest, but who extended them considerably by the voluntary submission of neighbouring monarchs, owing, most probably, to his merit. It was this scholar and philosopher who dispassionately formed his code upon the theories of the ancients; and who seems to have thought the modern mode of *cheapening* government, any further than to encourage industry, or answer the calls of national honour, however it might convey ideas of frugality, would in the end appear but bad œconomy.

Arise some golden age, prepared by science.] There seems no danger from real discoveries in science, clearly made out, which amply compensate for all bad consequences: the danger is from those who only

——“ Explain till all men doubt it,

“ And write about it, goddess, and about it.”

The caution sober-minded people think necessary in philosophy, reminds us of a similar principle in politics, the caution with which the friend of the constitution pronounces his opinion of the unalienable rights of the people. He knows that merely to allow their existence, is sufficient for every purpose of reasoning and of society, and rather avoids ungenerously putting governors in mind of their dependence; fully contented that it should be, in the words of Montesquieu, “ a republic hiding itself under “ the form of monarchy.”

Unanimity consist with freedom.] The advanced state of reason in England, where it is so difficult for incendiaries to drive the people to any worse excesses than a little parliamentary sparing, and the moderate opposition of a few discontented meetings, is at this time particularly remarkable. It is to be hoped we shall stand firm during the present storm of innovation; and when it has subsided, leaving us to the respect of ourselves and others, we shall look round with smiles at the unclouded prospect of our old ro-

mantic castles, in their accustomed beauty and security. We might then at leisure make some slight repairs, were we not obliged to think of satisfying demands against us. The payment of the national debt necessarily tending to the increase of liberty, it may seem extraordinary that we should not proceed in reducing it according to plans from which there has not yet been time enough to receive material benefit, but should endeavour (not only by promoting a spirit in the people favourable to such views, but by recommending the measure itself) in one act foolishly to ruin our own schemes, and unfaithfully to disappoint the expectation of our creditors. To effect this, we are told of the absurdity of hereditary honours, from the probability of their being sometimes possessed by weak men; though it is the use of talents of whatever sort, and not the possession of superior ones, that really deserves notice and regard.

To regulate the formation of a government not by the interests of the people, but by abstract notions, is absurd, and therefore a democracy may

in some countries not only have peculiar charms for the learned, prepossessed in favour of ancient republics, but be proper also for the illiterate man. The condemnation of titles, which in the course of time it has been expedient to create in this country, is on the other hand so little to be justified by the impossibility of merit's descending constantly with them from father to son, that this is what much recommends them. In the father, nobility is earned by personal qualifications; in the son it remains to prove, and is a perpetual memento, that the state considers talents or wealth as much secondary as artificial eminence, and that the greatest possible praise is that of adherence to its laws, and a conduct that may be rendered as conspicuous and exemplary by art, as it can by nature. It has indeed been observed, that hereditary distinctions are formed upon the *republican* principle of levelling natural and personal ones. I do not, however, contend that other states may not provide against the ambition of wealth and genius without the use of them; as there may be different forms of beauty;

and it is only where titles are retained, that they are eternal monuments of the sobriety of public opinion, and its averseness to change.

Here it is difficult to think of our ancient institutions, without at once desiring and dreading to speak, after an eloquent writer, of one sort of prejudice. I allude not to that prejudice which, being contrary to reason, it is unwise to retain; but of that which, having no effect but to promote our happiness, it is as unwise to part with. I speak of the gleanings of prejudice after the harvest of reason. However, when it is over, fancy too often “wakes to imitate her,” and those who then “drive afield” to carry away what is their due by established custom, uncertain who it is at work, are induced to withdraw, leaving their property in the hands of the remorseless plunderer. These gleanings are the very support of life. But supposing a veneration for systems connected with our history and literature, and our various monuments of antiquity and ingenuity superfluous, it is as little necessary to our happiness that pamphleteers should enjoy the fame of Solon

and Lycurgus, by instructing the representatives of this noble nation what to say in parliament, or how to change the government.

One who is in the habit of contemplating works of fancy and genius, is naturally led to notice a resemblance between the modern innovator, and the mannerist of every sort in the arts, who seeks to rouse the attention, not by new examples of acknowledged excellence, which his invention is unequal to the production of, but by a continual novelty of manner, instead of the eternal beauty of nature. Lucan and Bernini scorned the antique. Perhaps the poet most remarkable for erring on the right side, by building upon old foundations, was he, of whom it is said,

“ Nature and Homer were, he found, the same.”

Impatience of old things, as insipid, is natural to the human mind, though utterly subversive both of good taste and salutary institutions; and

the more natural, as the mind is weak, and the passions are ill regulated.

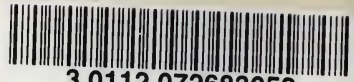
Let sincere reformers recollect, and others confess, that reformation is not a business, where liberty is directly concerned, so far as the excess of representation, in some parts of the country, is equal to the want of it in others. It will not be adding to the power of the people, and taking it from the crown, but only distributing that power which the people already have; so that there will not be the smallest democratic infusion into the composition of government. If liberty be measured by the proportion of representatives to their constituents, we may surely vie with France. However, supposing that too much influence in any case recommends some legal remedy, let us console ourselves, till it takes place, with the reflection, that influence is not power, but freedom.

It seems strange, that many politicians of this sort, are not able to give credit to all governments where man is treated as man. If there are

no ill effects of favouritism, if neither the power of imprisoning arbitrarily, nor of directing the decisions of justice, opens a field to oppression, such a government enjoys the chief advantages of a republic. The idea perpetually occurs, that men are equal, and made subordinate for their own obvious and immediate advantage; that he whose immoderate passions step more or less over the bounds marked out by the laws, is alone the king or the lord; and that envy, if implanted for any purpose in the human breast, ought to single out no other victim.

We may, upon the whole, be led to think, that the countrymen of Bacon, Locke, Newton,¹ and Hume, need not be taught philosophy by foreigners, *whether French or English ones*; and cautiously continue that reserve which, though termed pride by their enemies, seems to have been given as arms to defend their liberty and constitution. They have not a word in their language answering to the “*petite morale*;” but, on the other hand, neither do they deceive; and they are singular

only in a remarkable preference of essentials. There is indeed a school of schismatics even in this country; who, in spite of their friend Rousseau's doctrine, cannot learn the superior sublimity of passive virtue: but it is to be hoped our kings and our people may still receive encouragement, in proportion as they possess true English qualities.



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